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ABSTRACT

This paper describes experiences in teaching ethnic and linguistic minority children with learning difficulties and counseling their families, from 1976 to 1992 in Pakistan and England. The paper begins with a vignette describing an ethnic minority child with learning difficulties. A global approach to the issues is then presented, examining the various forms of educational provision for bilingual children, including mother tongue education, bilingual education, immersion, and submersion; the problems of children disadvantaged by the dominant culture and who further have a physical or mental disability; and the ways in which these children acquire and use language. Theoretical matters are illustrated with experiences from Pakistan and England, and recommendations are made. Recommendations address the need to provide mother tongue education for the early years of education, to consider cultural needs and differences in child rearing patterns among ethnic groups, to encourage teachers to develop their cross-cultural and linguistic competence, and to consider cultural and language factors in ability assessments. (Contains 22 references.) (JDD)

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ETHNIC & LINGUISTIC MINORITY CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

A Critical Review of Educational Language & Culture

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Pakistan and UK

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SUMMARY

This paper reports and discusses practical experiences of teaching mentally retarded children of ethnic and linguistic minorities, in Pakistan and in England. Experiences are set in a framework of recent developments in understanding of how children acquire speech, language and communication; also of the importance of family collaboration in special education, and the growing awareness of disadvantages suffered by children of minority cultures in schools that reinforce only the dominant culture. In the school headed by the author in Peshawar, Pakistan, up to six mother tongues were in daily use - Pushto, Urdu, Punjabi, Hindko, Persian and Chitrali - and many of the pupils used more than one language. On moving to England, the author taught in monolingual, monocultural, local authority schools and worked with families and children at home. In the schools, Asian children with learning difficulties found little or no support for their early efforts to communicate using their mother tongues and cultural norms learnt at home during preschool years. Individual cases histories illustrate the discussion. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations for policy and practice appropriate to a range of situations.

Key terms

Speech, Language, Communication, School, Education, Policy, Ethnic Minority, Language Minority, Cultural Minority, Bilingual, Multilingual, Multicultural, Bilingual Education, Special Education, Mental Retardation, Learning Difficulty, Language Acquisition, Language Policy, Mother Tongue, Immersion, Submersion, Asia, Pakistan, England, Pushto, Urdu, Punjabi, Hindko, Persian, Chitrali, Teacher Education.

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ETHNIC & LINGUISTIC MINORITY CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

A Critical Review of Educational Language & Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper arises from experiences of teaching ethnic and linguistic minority children with learning difficulties (1), and counselling their families, from 1976 to 1992 in Pakistan and in England (2, 3). During this period, several areas of professional knowledge made substantial advances:

a. **our understanding of the processes by which children with learning difficulties acquire speech, language and communication;**
b. **our appreciation of the vital role of families, and the need for home-school cooperation, in the education of special children;**
c. **our awareness of how the cultural background of many ethnic minority children may differ substantially from the dominant culture of schools.**

These developing areas of knowledge now require a sustained effort of synthesis, of communication to teachers and educational planners, and of practical evaluation, if our schools are to become more than a strange, frightening jungle for the young ethnic minority child with learning difficulties.

Such a synthesis is in progress, but is by no means complete, while the process of wider communication and serious evaluation has hardly begun. The issues will here be considered in a global context, examining the various forms of educational provision for biiingual children; the added problems of children disadvantaged by the dominant culture, and who further have a physical or mental disability; and the ways in which these children acquire and use language. Theoretical matters will then be illustrated with experiences from Pakistan and England, and some recommendations made. But first, the scene will be viewed through the eyes of Samina, an ethnic minority child with learning difficulties, who could be living in any of our countries (4).

2. THROUGH ONE CHILD'S EYES

Before Samina started school, she had begun to find her way around her little world at home. She learnt some important things about that world, and about communicating with other people. Mother, father and grandparents all talked to her. She learnt that a certain tone of voice and a particular set of the face meant they were pleased with her. Other sounds and looks meant they were not so pleased. She understood some things from the way they used their hands and moved their faces and bodies. She began making more sense of their voices, recognising sounds and gaining some idea of their meaning. She could use some of the sounds herself too. She knew that some sounds were names of people or things. She could use some sounds to show what she wanted. Using these sounds helped her to explore the world together with her family.

But now, for Samina, a new adventure begins. She starts school. Samina's family belong to a minority group, which originally came from another country. In the country where they now live, most people wear different kinds of clothes, eat different foods, have different customs and a different language. Samina does not realise this. But when she starts school, Samina cannot simply build on what she has already learnt. This new world of school has different rules, different sounds, different responses. Samina sits down to play with some toys. But then Teacher comes over and shouts something at her, in a tone that seems like anger to Samina. What she hears is a strange sound, a nonsense sound like "Ghuh-ghir!". Even worse, while saying "Good girl", Teacher's lips are drawn back so that Samina can see her teeth - does that mean Teacher is going to bite? Samina decides she had better not play with those toys again. Other people are also making strange sounds - but no words Samina can recognise. She tries to tell someone that she knows about some things in the classroom, but that person takes no notice of what she says, but only makes another strange noise. Samina asks for something, using the words she uses at home, but people take no notice. Finally, Samina stops trying to talk - there seems to be no point in trying to talk in school....

After some months, Samina will probably begin to make sense of what is happening in school, and will start again to learn to talk, and then to think in her new language. But Samina is enrolled in a 'special' school, because her development has been slower than expected (judging by the criteria of child

development in the majority group), and now the school culture and curriculum make her lose more time before she is ready to start learning. Samina's problems could be reduced if she were helped to build on what she had already learnt at home, while gradually being introduced to the new language.

Samina faces another problem if she lives in a country where children have their special needs 'assessed' during the first months at school, and where the results of this assessment become the guidelines for the rest of her school career. For Samina, those first months are a time when she is struggling to learn a new cultural system of communication and behaviour. She may be assessed and 'labelled' as having learning problems much more severe than is actually so. This would be unimportant, if her abilities and potential were re-assessed regularly and her work program adjusted to suit her achievements. Yet in many countries, the initial assessment dominates the entire school career.

3. A GLOBAL ISSUE

Every country now has people from more than one ethnic group, and it is common for one major ethnic group to dominate the others. Some minorities are indigenous, such as the Sami, Basques, Inuit, Maoris, Welsh etc. Others belong to immigrant minorities, including refugees. Often, minority groups suffer a devaluation, or even the active suppression, of their language and culture. In a very few countries, resources are controlled by a powerful ethnic minority group, and then it is the majority group whose language and culture may be down-valued. It is estimated that 60% of the world's children grow up in situations where they need to use more than one language (5). For many children, the language of school is different from that of home. Most countries have only one language of schooling. Some countries have more than one; but while there are perhaps a total of 400 languages used in schools around the world, there are more than 4,000 languages and cultural ethnic groups.

Education of minority groups, and the language medium of education, are highly political issues. Where 'education' is perceived as the transmission of cultural values, these are inevitably the values of the dominant culture. Education may be used as a political tool to promote 'national unity',

especially in countries with many indigenous ethnic groups. Where an attempt is made to impose one group's culture on another, it often stems from a view that the minority culture is inferior, rather than something to be preserved and respected. Socio-economic and political weakness, typical of minorities, is easily equated with linguistic and cultural inferiority. Minority families may feel that the only way their children may gain status in the mainstream of society is through proficiency in the national language. They may believe, and fear, that such proficiency can be achieved only at the expense of their own language.

Conversely, in 'traditional' schooling, where the main idea is to transfer to children a fixed body of 'knowledge', teachers are assumed to know everything needful, while children start with nothing. Such a system will not easily accept that minority children may possess their own valuable resources of linguistic and cultural knowledge, of which the teacher is ignorant. Literacy skills in minority language are not usually taught in schools. They may be dismissed as 'dialects' or 'vernaculars', being denied the status of languages. Only when an ethnic group begins to acquire some political or economic power do its members start to demand education for their children in their own language.

4. EDUCATION OF BILINGUAL CHILDREN

Using 'bilingual' in a broad sense, to cover children growing up in situations that oblige them to learn and use more than one language, there are four main models of education for bilingual children of normal abilities:

A. ***Mother tongue education*** **(6)**
B. ***Bilingual education***
C. ***Immersion***
D. ***Submersion***

Although these models all focus on language, the inclusion of other cultural elements in the school curriculum is important to enable the minority child both to relate to the school community and to maintain her awareness and respect for the culture of her own community.

A. Mother Tongue Education ('mother tongue' meaning the main language used with the child at home). Experience in many parts of the world shows that children benefit if their early education is in the language of their home. Even where government policy requires that secondary schools use a 'national' language for instruction, children will benefit if their own mother tongue continues to have the status of a school subject, valued and studied for public exams. These children maintain their self-respect and confidence through realising that a knowledge of their home language is a respected, worthwhile skill, and that their ethnic culture is valued by their teachers. UNESCO in 1953 published a document stating: 'On educational grounds we recommend that the use of the mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible' (7).

To implement a mother tongue language policy for all pupils is seldom easy. There may be a shortage of qualified teachers who speak the necessary languages. In modern cities, a single school may have pupils with over twenty mother tongues, from both immigrant and indigenous minorities. Nevertheless, where a country is serious about implementing a mother tongue policy, solutions can be found, e.g. teachers may be recruited from minority ethnic groups, or brought from the countries of origin of immigrant groups.

The main barriers to mother tongue education are political. Some people fear that mother tongue education may be socially divisive, e.g. where the government of a young country is trying to foster a sense of national unity and promote a 'national culture'. Policy-makers fear that if children in a multi-ethnic area are separated at school by linguistic groups, it may hinder social integration. Such points cannot be dismissed; yet they tend to obscure the fact that, in the long term, an educational system selectively denying minority children the chance to fulfil their potential, will be even more socially divisive and destructive.

Parents from minority groups sometimes fear that mother tongue education will limit their children's opportunity to become proficient in the national language, and so may reduce their chances of employment. Access to higher education may also be available only in national or foreign (ex-colonial) languages; so parents and teachers may wish the child to use this language at school as early as possible. Such views are understandable, but they ignore the

crucial benefits arising from education based in the child's experience of her mother tongue and the likely damage or delay (discussed below) to the child's cognitive development where mother tongue is neglected.

In some situations, mother tongue education has indeed been associated with the exclusion of children from full participation in society, e.g. many black children in South Africa and children of guest-workers in parts of Germany. In such situations, the teachers may have less training, schools less equipment, curricula may be limited and opportunities for contact with wider society restricted. These children are clearly 'disadvantaged' - but it is unreasonable to blame it on the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction. However, for the above reasons, mother-tongue education, if available at all, tends to be offered to minority groups only for early primary education. It is more likely to be offered where linguistic minorities have a high socio-economic status (e.g. Swedish in Finland; French in Canada; Welsh, increasingly, in Wales). Political expediency may also sometimes lead to special consideration for one particular minority group.

B. Bilingual Education Bilingual education requires bilingual teachers; or teachers of equal status working jointly in their own first languages. Teachers may choose to set rules about the situations in which each language is to be used - or they may slip easily and informally from one to another. Bilingual education should aim to develop the child's skills in both her languages. Her first language is helped to develop, and she uses it in developing her cognitive skills, at the same time as developing her skills in the second language.

Barriers to introducing bilingual education are similar to those to introducing mother tongue education:

a. Lack of information about the benefits to children. Families, and some uninformed professionals, may imagine that bilingualism is a burden to children, or that it will 'confuse' them;
b. Personnel, and financial resources.
c. Political will and priorities. In countries not yet having universal primary education, governments may feel that 'special needs' are a luxury (8). In pluralistic democracies, often dominated by powerful interest groups, it

may be electorally unpopular to budget extra resources for minorities education.

Bilingual education, as described above, sadly remains unusual. Other forms are sometimes found, in which bilingualism in the school is seen as temporary support until the child can replace his mother tongue with the second language. While the support is available, mother tongue is used as an aid to enable the child to understand new ideas and contribute in class. This 'diluted' bilingual education is better than nothing, since without it the child's progress would be delayed over the years needed for his second language to catch up with his cognitive development. However, it falls short of serious, on-going, mother tongue development, without which the language-dependent aspects of cognitive development will be restricted.

Indigenous minorities may have a bilingual 'support' model of education when their teacher shares their language. Here, though the formal curriculum and exams are in the 'official' language, the teacher gives explanations and discussion in the child's mother tongue. In urban or migrant situations, this sort of bilingual support may be provided by bilingual teachers in special units, or by untrained assistants working under the direction of the class teacher. Current U.S. legislation permits a bilingual support model of education - the child may be taught bilingually until he has achieved the level of proficiency in English that will enable him to benefit from an English-medium education. Again, political constraints may limit the financial support a government is prepared to make even to this form of education, and may result in the withdrawal of support at the earliest possible time, e.g. at a statutory age, regardless of individual needs. Like all programs benefitting weaker groups, it is an easy target for cuts during economic recession. The demoralisation of skilled personnel then makes it more difficult to restart later, and deters academics from attempting much-needed research in this complex field.

C. Immersion. This term is used in two different ways. True 'immersion' education is a form of bilingual education, where the teacher uses a second language in teaching a group of children all of whom share the same first language. In many countries, 'immersion' is used confusingly to refer to what

is now usually known in the bilingualism field as 'submersion'. In true immersion education, the teacher uses the target language; but she is bilingual and responds appropriately to children when they speak to her in their mother tongue. Children are free to talk together in their first language. A well-known example of immersion education is Canada's, where English-speaking children are taught by the medium of French. Children, including those with learning difficulties, have been found to make excellent progress when taught in this way, and to gain from their bilingual experience, rather than suffering by it (9, 10). Weber and Tardif provide interesting insights into the processes of children's communication and construction of meaning in an immersion kindergarten (11).

D. Submersion. This method puts the minority child in a situation where the teacher, and many of the other children, do not know his home language. He is actively discouraged from using it, and is expected to 'pick up' the majority language. Romaine reports that in some countries children are still punished for using their mother tongue in school. Even where this is not so, children are denied the opportunity to communicate freely with the teacher and they learn to see their own language and culture as inferior (12). Many such children fail to achieve their potential. Children entering a submersion situation commonly begin with a 'silent period', which may last a few weeks. Next, the child starts trying to communicate, and often shows that he has learnt many conversational skills through silent observation. Sometimes however the child remains silent for longer, and finds it hard to communicate even after several months.

Current theories of linguistic/cognitive development suggest that children do not simultaneously learn new ideas and new forms of language. A child may have in her first language, the words and grammar she needs to acquire new cognitive skills, but if these are presented in the second language she is instead held back, often for years, until she is able to express the concepts in the second language. A child may 'pick up' second language social and conversational skills in about two years; but Cummins has shown that it may take up to seven years for a child to learn enough of the second language for cognitive development to equal that of her monolingual peers (13). Although children exposed to the second language at a young age may seem to progress

more quickly in acquiring superficial conversational skills, children who have been educated in their mother tongue until the upper levels of primary education (aged perhaps 9 or 10), make faster progress in acquiring cognitive skills in their second language. Under-achieving bilingual children can make much better progress if, for example, maths skills are taught in their mother tongue (14, 15). Cummins suggests that there is a minimum threshold level of achievement which needs to be crossed in both languages for a child not to suffer negative effects from learning through a second language (16, 17). A second, higher threshold is also postulated: when this is reached in both languages, bilingualism will lead to accelerated cognitive development.

Despite its evident flaws, submersion education is the commonest provision in many countries, in multi-ethnic city situations and for migrant communities. The submersion of ethnic minority children requires the least thought, effort and resources in the short term. It amounts to little more than throwing children into the river. The fact that some of them manage to swim, is taken as proof of the effectiveness of the policy. Those who sink (into silence and failure) are not noticed - until, perhaps, some of them begin raising hell as teenagers and young adults. Their behaviour then is taken as proof of the inferiority of the ethnic minority culture.

Even where the aim of the education service is to assimilate minorities into the mainstream of society, this would be done more effectively by a bilingual model, and would be culturally much more constructive. The more constructive approach, maximising children's opportunities and achievements, would require mother tongue education for at least the first three or four years, followed by a well-resourced bilingual model, where both languages continue to develop. Certainly, this approach needs more planning and resources; but planners should weigh that against the social costs of the angry, hopeless, inner-city ghettoes that earlier, short-sighted economic and social policies have often created.

5. CHILDREN DAMAGED BY 'CULTURAL DEPRIVATION'

Some children do overcome the difficulties outlined above, but other children are disadvantaged to the extent of seeming to have difficulties in learning. Although language is the most obvious factor, other cultural factors can have

a powerful influence on the child's development. Feuerstein worked fruitfully in Israel with children who were failing to progress at school, from immigrant groups who perceived their own cultures as inferior or inappropriate to their new situation. He found that the children suffered from 'cultural deprivation' (18); but by this term Feuerstein was not concurring in the negative judgement of the ethnic cultures. The problem he identified, and aimed to remedy, was that the families had made no efforts to pass on the stories, music and cultural values of their place of origin, because their circumstances caused them to view their own heritage as worthless, indicative of their low status and a matter of shame. Similar cycles of low self-esteem and low achievement appear in minority groups world-wide - but Feuerstein's successes show that the cycle can be broken. This can be the experience of small indigenous minorities whose culture is dying; of immigrant groups; and may also be the experience of village people who move to the city and find their customs 'backward' compared to the slickness of city ways.

6. MINORITY CHILDREN WITH PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DISABILITIES

Minority communities are at least as likely to have children with disabling conditions as are majority groups. For several reasons, they may easily have more: their weak economic situation affects nutrition, water supply and access to health information and medical facilities. Yet minority leaders may hesitate to highlight the needs of their disabled adults or children, especially with regard to learning difficulties. There is a risk of reinforcing negative stereotypes of their group, i.e. as people who are stupid and genetically inferior. It may thus becomes controversial within the minority community, to demand special help for their disabled members. Some minorities have organised self-help tuition groups or language and cultural heritage classes for their own children, to compensate for the deficiencies of 'official' schooling, and a few governments and aid agencies have had the good sense to support these efforts. Unfortunately, for lack of the necessary pedagogical skills, such initiatives are also liable to neglect minority children with severe learning difficulties.

7. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR MINORITY CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The normal child already uses language to communicate before going to school, while the child with learning difficulties may not yet have learnt the purpose of talking. The latter has, however, learnt many skills related to language, which need to be developed further: e.g. listening skills; identifying some of the sounds of her own language; perhaps even recognising some words or sounds; non-verbal communication. The competent primary teacher should build upon these early skills, instead of starting from zero. Unfortunately, though their need for well-resourced mother tongue or bilingual education is actually greater, minority children with learning or language difficulties are even less likely to receive it than their normal siblings. The special child's mother tongue pre-language skills are usually invisible to her new, non-specialist teacher.

In deciding the language medium for special schools, the preconceptions of the majority community are often visible. In societies like England, dominated by a monolingual majority, to learn two languages is seen as a difficult task - far beyond the capacity of children with learning problems. So it is felt that the vital language for the child to learn is that of the majority community - even though, compared with her normal siblings, this child is more likely to spend her life within her own minority-language group. In contrast, bilingualism is unlikely to be considered difficult in multilingual societies like Pakistan. Here, the damaging prejudice is more likely to be that the 'official' language is 'superior' to those of minorities.

Some less trivial arguments have been proposed, for providing 'submersion' even for children with learning difficulties. It was once thought that a child needed a clear separation between the environments in which each language was used, so that she should not be at risk of 'mixing' her languages (19). For many years this was thought the best approach, without any research evidence. It has since been shown that more flexible approaches can be more effective. Linguists now see that it is not a serious issue if a child sometimes uses in one language a word or form from the other. Normal children, acquiring two languages simultaneously, often use a mixed form of languages until between two and three years old, then spontaneously start using them separately (20, 21).

8. SOME INPUTS FROM LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORY

This is a fast-developing and complex field, which is hard to summarise, but a few points of relevance to our special minority children are outlined:

A. Children with learning and language difficulties need to learn the habit of communicating, and to be rewarded for their efforts to do so. Conversely, if a teacher (or other adult in school, since the child does not differentiate their status) fails to recognise and respond to the communication skills which the child already acquired before starting school, it is a disincentive to communication. On the behaviourist model, non-response amounts to the child being punished for attempting to communicate - which discourages the child from further efforts.

B. Cultural differences in non-verbal forms of expression are easily overlooked by school adults. Gesture, facial expression, volume and tone of voice, tempo and rhythm of speech, patterns of laughing, crying, sighing, gaze movements and body postures all vary cross-culturally (22). Without detailed study of children's development of awareness of these features, one cannot predict which ones will affect the child's willingness to respond and relate to an adult.

C. It was noted above that the normal child, communicating easily in her first language, quickly acquires superficial conversational skills in another language - but it is the more complex language and cognitive skills, needed for school work, that she finds harder. The child with learning difficulties may not have acquired the skills of basic conversation in one language before meeting the second language - so she will meet problems at this stage if her efforts to use her first language are not encouraged and supported.

D. A child normally learns the conceptual meaning of words through a process of negotiation with more mature language users, discovering how a word or group of words is used appropriately. Yet the child in a submersion setting gets no response to his attempts at communication during this vital stage of defining concepts and meanings. Once a meaning is established, it seems to be a relatively easy task to attach another appropriate label from a second language to that meaning. Learning two languages does not seem to be the big problem. Many children acquire two languages simultaneously from

their parents - but, as in an immersion school, both parents understand and respond appropriately to the child, whichever language she uses. The difficulty for the child arises when there is a disregard of the skills acquired in, or related to, her first language; and the demand that she must re-learn basic skills as required by the second language before progressing any further.

E. Acquiring cognitive skills is now understood to depend partly on language skills. Much of the child's mental development is dependent on his acquisition of the linguistic tools of thinking. If schools insist that this is done through a second language, the child's development risks being needlessly delayed (13).

F. Sometimes the difference in child rearing patterns of minority groups may affect the child's acquisition of language. This may occur where the normal patterns of family life change by migration or urbanisation. For example, in the extended family systems common in rural Asia, it may not be customary for a child to talk to or play with parents. Cousins, unmarried aunts or siblings take these roles. Mother concentrates on kitchen and housework, while father goes out to his work. But when a family unit moves to the city, or migrates abroad, mother may continue the restricted role that she has always played, even though now there are no cousins or aunts in the household, and the older siblings go out to school. Who now plays with, talks to, and stimulates the infant? The child in this situation may acquire some language through passive observation - but needs to be helped to learn that she can use these words herself, to communicate her interests, wishes, needs. If the only adults who are available and interested to talk to her, i.e. at school, function in a different language to that which she has passively acquired, she will be further disadvantaged.

G. It is sometimes proposed to ethnic minority parents that they should use only the majority language with their child with learning difficulties - supposing they are both proficient in it. However this amounts to a form of 'apartheid' in the home. If other family members continue to function in their own language, the one child becomes marked out as 'separate' from the rest of her family.

For these many reasons, the provision of mother tongue and/or bilingual special education for children from minority communities with language or

learning difficulties is urgently needed. It is not a luxury for these children to have the opportunity to learn through their mother tongue - it is the only way to avoid compounding their disadvantages.

9. EXPERIENCES IN PAKISTAN

From 1978 to 1989, I headed a special school for children with learning difficulties and multiple handicaps in Peshawar in the north west of Pakistan, a country where, during the 1980s, special services developed appreciably (23, 24). The considerable ethnic and linguistic diversity of Peshawar's population was reflected in both pupils and staff (25). Different cultural practices are evident - e.g. Pathans and Hindko speakers swaddle their infants, but Punjabi or Urdu speakers do not. Marriage outside the ethnic group, or even the family, is rare and limited to the social extremes, e.g. some Westernised professionals, and some of the lowest social classes. The different linguistic, cultural and religious groups all have some mutual mistrust, and are ready to say that, for example, the others are dirty, or do not care properly for children. Such cultural differences could sometimes affect teachers' views of their pupils.

Our pupils came from homes using the following languages:

Hindko: local language of Peshawar city. A few pupils spoke the Hindko dialect of another town.

Pushto: language of local villages and of many people who had migrated from rural areas, including many Afghans.

Punjabi: language of Pakistan's largest ethnic group, who are a minority in Peshawar. Various dialects. Some pupils from religious minorities (Christians and Hindus) were Punjabi speaking.

Urdu: home language of only a few pupils - some belonged to Urdu speaking ethnic groups, but other families chose to use it because they were 'educated'. (Urdu is Pakistan's national language).

Chitrali: a language of the mountains to the north. Spoken by two pupils, but by no staff. One child was already bilingual, with Urdu; the other was brought to school by his cousin. Later the family employed a Pushto-speaking servant to look after him, so we

also used Pushto and the child soon started to talk in both languages.

Persian: one child in the school belonged to a Persian-speaking family. This was also the mother tongue of one teacher.

My school policy (26) was to use each child's mother tongue when speaking to him or her, until he/she was speaking fluently. New cognitive stages, such as counting and arithmetic, were explained in mother tongue. As a child developed fluent communication in his mother tongue, we introduced some Urdu - which was needed in case of transfer to a mainstream school, and for literacy and social skills. Once children began to speak, they soon picked up words of other languages and addressed one another in the language of either participant. Most children were exposed to more than one language at home as well as at school. Adults in Peshawar speak different languages in different contexts, according to subject matter, the status and education of the person being addressed, and other factors. It is not unusual to hear someone switch between three languages while speaking two sentences.

Our children all had learning difficulties, many of them severe, yet they gave no evidence of being seriously confused by this multi-lingual situation. They did not get their languages mixed up - at least no more than was considered normal in this city. If a child tried to say something, but could not manage it in one language, she might try again in another. Most importantly, many children who were unable to speak when they began school, soon started talking. Individual skill and progress records were kept for all children, but we did not at that time make detailed analyses of their use of different languages, partly because there was nothing 'unusual' about our children using and developing several languages. However, some idea of progress can be gained from two individual histories:

A. Parveen, who has Down Syndrome

Parveen's mother, a teacher, usually speaks Urdu with her children, and they speak Urdu in play together. With other adult family members and friends she usually speaks Punjabi, her own 'mother tongue'. Her servant, who helped look after Parveen, speaks only Pushto, but understands a little Urdu and Punjabi. Parveen started to talk when she was eight years old. She first used Urdu, but before she had a vocabulary of 20 words she was also using

some Punjabi and some Pushto. Sometimes she knew an equivalent word or phrase in more than one language, and used them in different situations. She soon learnt which language worked best with which person. If she could express something in only one of her languages, she used that - the adults she knew could understand all three languages, so would respond appropriately, but would also tell her what she could have said in their preferred language.

Most of our children picked up languages in a relaxed way like Parveen. The teacher would teach them a new skill in their own language - and we would soon find that they had learnt the equivalent in another language from the other children. Teachers easily slipped from language to language in discussion with the children, as they did with one another.

B. Ameer

Ameer's family speak Pushto. When they realised Ameer had learning difficulties they thought it would be easier for him to learn only one language. They decided that Ameer would have better chances in life if he learned Urdu. At home, members of the family spoke together in Pushto, but when talking to Ameer they used Urdu. Ameer learned to talk a stilted Urdu, slow with long gaps between words. Ameer could not attend an ordinary school, so he enrolled with us. His teacher used four languages with the children, addressing each in his home language and sometimes talking more generally in Urdu. Ameer could obviously understand what was said in Pushto, but never spoke it. As he got older, Ameer's behaviour became disturbed. He would not play with the other children, and began to act in a babyish way. His Urdu became more stilted. He now spoke in a staccato manner, still with gaps between each word.

The teacher decided to take action. For a week, he spoke Pushto to Ameer. Finally, Ameer replied in Pushto. He found he could talk like the other children in his family. The teacher encouraged him for another week and Ameer became happier, stopped being babyish, and resumed playing with the other boys. After two weeks, the teacher visited Ameer's home. His parents had noticed his improved behaviour, but they did not know any reason. The teacher arranged to speak with the children in the courtyard while the adults stayed inside and listened. He called Ameer and started talking Pushto to him. Ameer was silent, then tried to answer in Urdu. The teacher did not accept

this. Ameer tried whispering a word in Pushto. The sky did not fall. He said something else. He spoke louder. His brother spoke to him, and Ameer answered in Pushto. Ameer's parents heard all this, but failed to see why the teacher was doing it. He suggested that they simply talk Pushto to Ameer like the rest of their children, and notice the results. They took this advice, and at last Ameer felt he was part of his own family. He spoke Pushto much of the time now - but his Urdu also started to improve. The parents really could not see how this happened, but they were happy - as was Ameer too.

10. EXPERIENCES TRANSFERRED TO ENGLAND

On return to UK, I worked with children from ethnic minorities in special schools. They were expected to attend schools with a submersion model of education, often with no first language support provided. English people seldom have experience of being bilingual. Most people think that you need to be 'very clever' to use two languages. So it would be 'impossible' for children with learning difficulties to master such a 'complex skill' as becoming bilingual.

In normal English schools there is a growing awareness of the needs of bilingual ethnic minority children, and multicultural approaches are used; but in special schools these approaches are sometimes seen as non-essential 'extras'. For most teachers, the native English ways of eating, dressing, making tea, taking a bath, are considered the 'right' ways to do things, and so should be taught to children in special schools - even if their families might use different methods at home. In such circumstances, how does a child like Samina (section 2 above) manage to learn to talk? Will she speak English, or her mother tongue?

My observations and interaction with 30 children, using tape-recorder, video camera and language analysis over two years, revealed no clear pattern. Some children became more proficient in their 'home' language, others in the 'school' language. Some children only ever spoke in one of the two languages they understood. Most children never tried to use their mother tongue at school - if a child could speak on starting school, her attempts to use language would fade out over the first few weeks as she got no response from adults. It might be months or years before she would be ready to try again, using

English. Children found it strange when I started using their mother tongue with them in school - it might take several days or weeks for children to respond in their home language in the 'wrong' environment. (It was not possible to know accurately what languages children had been able to speak on starting school, as the school kept no record of mother tongue ability. Only English was recorded).

In discussing their child's communication skills with a group of ten minority-language-speaking mothers, I found half the mothers were well aware of their child's level of language. They were very supportive and encouraging to their child's development of communication skills. The other five were unable or unwilling to discuss communication skills. Some said they never talked to their child, because they had no English and feared that if the child learned some Punjabi it would interfere with his learning English. Other mothers said they did not talk to their child because to do so was not their role - the child would play and talk with other children.

Some Individual Children (4)

Hamida's mother did not talk or play with her at home. Mother had been told Hamida was 'handicapped' - so she thought Hamida would understand nothing. Hamida sat quietly on the sofa all day at home. Starting school, she continued to sit quietly. Hamida's class had a weekly session with a teacher who could speak the language of Hamida's family. The teacher talked to Hamida. After a few weeks, Hamida decided to reply. While playing in the playhouse, Hamida showed that she knew a lot of her home language. The teacher made a video of Hamida playing and talking in the playhouse and showed it to Hamida's mother. Mother was amazed. She did not know her little girl could play, and could talk! Now Hamida's mother talks to her at home. Hamida still knows only a few words of English, but at home she has plenty to say.

Shahid, aged 18, attended another school. Sometimes he made a lot of sounds. His teacher asked a bilingual person to listen to Shahid, to see if he was using a language. The answer was no, it was only babble. When I met Shahid, I confirmed that his 'language' was babble, but I responded by speaking his

home language. After a few days, he began to make real remarks - comments about the weather, who he liked and disliked - quite mature sentences. I taught Shahid for only a few weeks, and found that he had much language inside his head but he had never had a chance to use it - during his many years at school.

Jamila's mother seldom speaks to her at home, but Jamila has several sisters with whom she plays. The sisters use English, so Jamila also uses English. She has learnt to talk through the games her sisters play - she learnt to recite nursery rhymes before she could make requests, and to give orders before indicating what she liked. She now uses a few words of her mother tongue too.

Ashok's mother speaks to him at home in their language - and he has become quite fluent. Although he has been at school for two years, he still says only 'yes' and 'no' in English. But he has a good basis of language at home.

Nergis could speak in her mother tongue when she started school, but she found that her teacher did not respond. Over a few weeks she stopped trying to use the language she knew. After a year, she began to use a few words of English, but still the only time she could develop her language at school was when the bilingual teacher worked with her.

Wajid. Sometimes a child moves to another country when he is already long past the age of normal school admission. He might have learnt social behaviour different from that required in the new country. Rules vary, for example, about where to look when adults are angry - in some countries a child should look at the floor; in others, look at the adult's face. Adults may get very angry at the 'wrong' response! A boy may have learnt ways of behaving towards women, which are not accepted in the new country. Wajid came from Pakistan to England, after learning that a boy should not sit next to a woman in a bus. On starting school in England, he was expected to travel with a woman bus escort, which led to some misunderstandings.

Ayesha was ten years old when she started school in England. She could talk, her parents had taught her the names of the colours and she could count to ten. She liked her teacher and wanted to please. When asked the colour of an

object, she gave the answer she knew in Punjabi, but the teacher was not pleased. Ayesha found that if she said "yellow" - at least she was right sometimes. So Ayesha forgot the colour names she knew so well. When using numbers, Ayesha began always to give the reply "two". She did not know what it meant, but at least sometimes the teacher was pleased.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. General

1. If the purpose of special education is to enable each child to make maximum progress in acquiring suitable skills and culture both for the present and for adult life, then provision of mother tongue education for each child during her early years of education is an obvious need. Switching from this to a bilingual model may take place after the child has achieved communication skills, where there are good reasons for a switch, e.g. to facilitate transfer to mainstream education, or to improve majority language competence for social or employment reasons. Where a bilingual model is introduced, it should be one that helps both languages to continue to develop. There is also an urgent need for programs with a 'participant research' component, reinforcing an evaluative mentality in teachers and families while documenting results, problems and solutions.

2. In some situations, where there are strong social advantages in using a majority or official language, teachers and parents should be given information about why, even so, a mother tongue or bilingual policy is in the best interests of their children. It should be explained that at first the child needs to learn about using language and communication skills - the most effective way to do this is through the mother tongue, and skills learnt in this way will transfer to a second language, making it easier to master the second language (rather than gaining merely a shallow grasp of it).

3. Similarly, cultural needs and differences in child rearing patterns among ethnic groups should be taken into account - on the basis of the actual needs and experiences of the children and the perceptions of their families, rather than what the majority community, members of the elite class or politically motivated spokespersons might express as their ideal.

4. In practice the solutions that can be adopted will depend on political constraints and financial limitations. Yet within any of these constraints, it is possible to use the light of research data and experience, rather than planning by guesswork and prejudices. Language-of-education battles have been in progress for over a century, concerning schools for children of normal ability, with a steady accumulation of useful experience (27). We should not have to start again from scratch, for children with learning difficulties.

B. A Special School in an Area with an Indigenous Ethnic Minority

If a special school serves an area where all its pupils speak a language other than that of the education system, it should be possible for children to learn through their mother tongue. Where it is possible for some children to transfer to the mainstream, there should be no difficulties for them to start studying bilingually, once their use of the mother tongue is well established, and provided that new concepts are first explained through mother tongue. A school in such an area may have a minority of children whose families do speak the official language. Numbers of children, size of school and other factors may determine whether to make a separate class for this group, or to have classes which function bilingually. If possible, classes should be arranged in such a way that there are at least two children who speak the same languages, so that they can talk together.

C. Cities or Areas Where Many Languages Are Spoken

In some countries, a city school may have children speaking ten or more languages. It could seem an 'impossible' task to provide mother tongue education in so many languages. Yet in practice, if this were made a priority, teachers and ancillary staff (some of them part-time) could be recruited from most of the communities involved. Children who were still at the stage of developing communication skills could be placed in classes where their mother tongue speaker was available to respond to them, and at some times of the day children could be separated into mother tongue groups for certain lessons or stories. Again, if possible, two or more children speaking the same language should be together in a class, for mutual support. In addition to language factors, teachers should take care to find out about other relevant cultural and child-rearing practices. In doing this, teachers should aim to obtain information to adapt the provision in the school - not in order to impose their own cultural norms on the family.

D. Where There Are Difficulties

1. In countries with established systems of special education, additional provision may be limited, or unavailable for minority groups; and school managers and teachers may be reluctant to adapt their methods for the needs of minority groups, especially those migrating from economically weaker countries. Mother tongue or bilingual models appear to be the best provision to meet the special needs of the child, but where these are not available, other measures may be taken that will reduce the potential damage of a submersion experience.

2. Where teachers cannot be provided who can use a child's language, it may be possible to employ bilingual ancillary staff. These would work under the instruction of a monolingual teacher, but should also receive training in ways of encouraging use of mother tongue, and in teaching the child. Where special education services are established, special schools often have visits from students and volunteers helping in the classroom, many of them from the same communities as the children. They may need guidance in using their language skills with the children - but this should be encouraged, and regarded as a valuable contribution. Some parents and relatives may also be willing to help in school, especially if made aware that their language and culture is valued.

3. Children learning to talk are often most expressive in a simulation 'house' area, set up with dolls, and toy household items. Such an area may be set aside for use by children when accompanied by someone who speaks their mother tongue and will respond and encourage them to use it. This gives a chance - within the school - to maintain or develop mother tongue; and shows the child that in at least one 'school' place, she can get a response to her communication efforts.

4. Close involvement with parents in order to monitor the child's development is especially necessary where the child's teacher cannot personally assess her development in mother tongue.

5. Parents may need encouragement and support to maintain the child's mother tongue - they may have been over-influenced to think that the majority language is more important, since that is what the school uses.

6. Age of school admission - it is sometimes recommended that children from minority language families should attend a majority language submersion school or nursery from the earliest possible age. This is likely to be a highly damaging policy. Children would benefit more from staying in an environment where there mother tongue is encouraged and supported until they are talking confidently and have a good repertoire of concepts expressible in their mother tongue (5, 7, 28).

E. Factors in Ability Assessments

In countries with an established special education service, children are often assessed at an early age regarding their educational needs. Children from ethnic minorities may be disadvantaged in several ways:

a. Mother tongue assessments. it has been suggested for several years that assessments of a child's abilities should be carried out in his first language, but this does not always happen.
b. A child's language development may be delayed by a submersion experience - his first language makes no further progress, but he has not had time to start to use the second language.
c. Allowance for effects of cultural differences - e.g. in the culture of his home, a particular child may not be expected to talk to adults.
d. Cultural disruption - in the absence of the extended family members, patterns of child rearing may be disrupted, as family members traditionally responsible for stimulation of infants may not be available and mother is unaware of the need for her to fulfil a new role. The effects of this on the child's development should be taken into account when determining his future.

F. Teacher Education and Research

If the new, and rapidly growing, understanding of educational language and culture, as described in this paper, is to have a serious impact on education systems, it must begin to be written into both initial and inservice teacher education. Encouragement and incentives should be given to teachers to develop their cross-cultural and linguistic competence; and to engage in collaborative studies drawing upon the skills and experience of families, community volunteers, speech therapists, psychologists and home-school liaison workers.

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NOTES & REFERENCES

1. **The English terms 'ethnic' and 'minority' belong to the 1980s and may be challenged as they are used for political purposes. However, no widely understood alternatives are yet available. 'Learning difficulties' is now officially used in British education, to label conditions for which 'mental handicap' and 'intellectual impairment' are used in some other countries.**

2. **MILES, C. (1991) Mobilising skills for special education in Pakistan: a personal cross-cultural experience, International Journal of Special Education 6: 201-212.**

3. **The problems of ethnic and linguistic minorities concerned me even earlier, as a Welsh-speaking child in a monocultural English-medium boarding school - but at that time, like almost all children who find themselves in this situation, I had no opportunity to formulate and express my point of view.**

4. **The names of children cited in this chapter have all been changed, to protect their privacy.**

5. **CAZDEN, C., SNOW, C. & HEISE-BAIGORRIA, C. (1991) Language planning in pre-school education, The Coordinators' Notebook 9: 1-12. New York: UNICEF (Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development).**

6. **The term 'mother tongue' usually means the language spoken in a child's home, but this is not always so. For example, the 1962 Census of India listed 1,652 languages, of which 47 are used in schools and are recognised, for educational purposes, as 'mother tongues'. Thus, for official purposes, the term 'mother tongue' does not necessarily mean the language of the**

child's home. In India it may refer to the second language which the child learnt at school (PATTANAYAK, D.P. (1981) Multilingualism and Mother Tongue Education. Delhi: Oxford University Press).

7. UNESCO (1953) The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education. Paris.

8. Two points are important:
   (a) If economically weaker countries wait until they have over 90% primary education before paying attention to 'special needs', it will then take another 30 years before their educationists become familiar with the problems and solutions. Even the poorest country should have some experimental special needs education projects, to build up experience, possibly in collaboration with voluntary interest groups.
   (b) Attention to special needs, and appropriate provisions, has had a great impact on the development of 'normal' education in Western countries. Third world governments should not deprive themselves of the means afforded by the 'special' sector to innovate and experiment, which should have marked benefits for the mainstream.

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22. POYATOS, F. (1988) New research perspectives in cross cultural psychology through non-verbal communication studies, in F. POYATOS (ed) Cross Cultural Perspectives in Non-Verbal Communication pp.35-69. New York: C.J. Hogrefe.

23. MILES, M. (1991) Mental Handicap Services: Development Trends in Pakistan. Peshawar: Mental Health Centre. (ERIC: ED 342 187).

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25. The languages of education in Pakistan are English, spoken by a small elite minority; and Urdu, which is the national language, but is mother tongue of less than 10% of the population - mainly of refugees from India at Partition, and also of a small cultural elite. In Sindh Province, Sindhi is also used as a medium of education. Peshawar is the capital of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, where the majority ethnic group is Pushto-speaking Pathans. However, indigenous Peshawar citizens are mostly Hindko speakers. The city has several minority groups - the largest being Punjabi speakers, but also communities originating in the mountains, speaking languages such as Chitrali or Shina. Persian speaking traders have been in Peshawar for generations, and still maintain a separate identity, using their own language in the home. Many Afghans now live in Peshawar. The majority speak Pushto of a slightly different, but comprehensible, dialect; others speak Persian or Turkoman or several other languages. In addition to linguistic minorities, there are religious minorities. Most Pakistanis are Muslims, but there are small numbers of Hindus and Christians, Parsees, Buddhists, Sikhs and Kalash.

26. Most of Pakistan's other special schools seem to use Urdu, or even English, as the principal medium, with some informal instruction via local languages according to the teacher's ability and inclination.

27. cf. SMITH, Frank (1922) Bilingualism and mental development, British Journal of Psychology 13: 271-282. Quoting studies back to 1890, Smith states that "no educationist now questions the supreme claim of the vernacular to the first place in the curriculum, long and bitter though the controversy has been."

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